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FOR A SUNDAY RELEASE

The educational process at Montana State University - or any other school - would grind to a halt in a hurry without three indispensable elements: students, teachers and books. MSU has a good supply of these essentials plus the laboratory and other research and instructional facilities that form a fourth leg of support for a balanced program of education and service.

But these props must be continually strengthened if they are to bear the University's burden of preparing men and women to cope with Space-Age living. They must be constantly bolstered if they are to withstand the buffeting of winds of change. To neglect any one of them is to invite collapse of the whole structure.

Onrushing changes in one of these underpinnings - the student body - call for shoring up the others. Everybody knows about the student population explosion, and nearly everybody thinks he knows what should be done to save the pieces. A man really qualified by training and experience to suggest some answers is Earle C. Thompson, new dean of library service at MSU.

Thompson's primary concern is with books or, more accurately, with the library; and he is quick to point out that a modern library encompasses a great deal more than books. He expects to devote most of his time to developing overall expansion of library services, including the planning of a new building, while Miss Kathleen Campbell, head librarian, continues to carry major responsibility for internal administration of the library.

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The former associate director of the Louisiana State University Library, who took up his duties at MSU in July, has some ideas about what the MSU Library will have to do about space, staff and equipment to keep pace with changes in the student body, faculty and research programs.

Thompson notes that the student body has doubled in the past decade and is likely to double again in the next. The library faces an urgent need for space to accommodate the sheer numbers of its users and the materials they will need.

The student body is not only mushrooming in numbers but it is changing in composition. More and more of its members are married and more and more of them are working part time to pay for their education and to support their families. These 1964 facts of college life mean that library hours have to be extended to fit in with the unorthodox study schedules of today's students.

A more subtle change shows up in a lack of respect for authority and property on the part of some students. This attitude is not in evidence in the majority, but Thompson feels it is more prevalent in the current crop of collegians than in their predecessors.

To keep the library open longer hours, safeguard materials and maintain discipline and control will require more personnel, Thompson says. He believes that much of the needed manpower can be supplied by student assistants. Other aspects of library expansion will, of course, require additional professional librarians.

A consequence of larger classes is a trend to throw the student more on his own resources. Professors must of necessity assign more independent work, so the library must organize materials in such a way that they are available to untrained undergraduates without losing their usefulness to faculty and graduate research scholars. The greater demands on the library by undergraduate may mean, in time, development of a separate undergraduate library facility, Thompson says.

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The boom in academic and scientific publications, especially the latter, creates problems of finding room for this snowballing mass of material and of making it accessible to users. Handling this proliferation of printed matter will involve increased use of miniaturization processes, introduction of more complex indexing systems, and probable use of computers.

The library specialist foresees eventual integration of MSU's present audio-visual processes into the library program. These processes are important not only as classroom aids but also for individual study. The library will have to stock more microfilm readers, tapes, records, slides and film strips. Provision will have to be made for individual listening cubicles.

These changes in the library are suggested by a cursory survey of the situation at MSU; but an overall, integrated plan for library services will take awhile to evolve, according to Thompson.

He thinks it is highly impractical to remodel or add to the existing library building. He is convinced it would be more economical in the long run to build a new one. "And even though the need for more space is already painfully evident," he points out, "it will take some time to develop a library program to the point where we will know what type of building and operation are best suited to our needs."

In the meantime, Thompson and his staff must operate in obsolescent quarters. The present building, erected in 1923, is crowded and it is not functional. In spite of this physical handicap, the MSU Library ranks high regionally and nationally, Thompson says, but if its pressing needs are not met, it could lose this standing.

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A good library will double in size in about 10 years, Thompson commented. The MSU Library has a good record of growth, adding in recent years an average of 12,000 volumes annually, about the limit the present staff can process. The library will not be able to maintain this rate of growth without more resources. Staff requirements are especially critical, he says, because no matter how much money is available, it can't be used properly without adequate staff.

The library compares favorably in other respects with libraries at similar schools in the region. A recent survey of library facilities at MSU, Montana State College, Colorado State University and the Universities of Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada and New Mexico shows MSU leading the league in the percentage of the total educational and institutional budget spent on the library. MSU spends 5.7 per cent of this budget on the library while the norm is five per cent.

Of the seven universities surveyed by the MSU Library Committee, MSU ranks second in expenditure per student and second in size of collection but falls to fifth place in expenditure for salaries. A similar survey the committee made of 22 western colleges and universities places MSU 13th in per cent of library budget allocated to salaries and 15th in total number of staff.

Both studies indicate that, generally, MSU does well in expenditures for books and materials but lags behind comparable institutions in expenditures for staff.

Summing up, Thompson says, "As far as its ability to serve the academic needs of the University right now, the library rates high, but we have to keep moving ahead just to stay abreast."

Shaping and directing the course of this movement is Thompson's mission at MSU.

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